

ultratravel

DIRECTORY

EDITED BY LISA GRAINGER

SNOW LOVELY

Rovaniemi, in northern Finland, is a town like no other. For a start, it has fewer people than reindeer. Dozens of its menfolk sport big white beards. And it has an enormous post office: a great log cabin in the middle of nowhere. But then the town is, theoretically, the home of Santa Claus, the destination to which thousands of children are brought to indulge fantasies of flying reindeer, sleighs and a red-suited giver of gifts.

What makes this place different from the other Santa-theme park in northern Scandinavia is that Rovaniemi does tourism without tackiness, offering old-fashioned sleigh rides, husky races, and visits to reindeer farms and craftsmen in picture-perfect countryside. Even more appealingly, now that there is an overnight sleeper from Helsinki that whisks travellers into Rovaniemi in time for breakfast, it is possible to take a long weekend break to the Arctic Circle, and to do it in style.

At Rovaniemi train station, a driver from

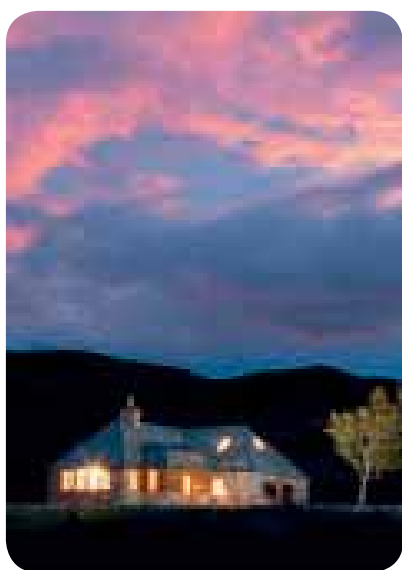
Lapland Safaris (www.lapinsafarit.fi) picks you up, and in a chain-wheeled four-by-four takes you to a log-cabin house (with private chef, if you fancy), before a snowmobile ride through the hills, whizzing over the countryside and icy lakes. There's a chance to stop at the Arctic Circle Reindeer Farm (www.porofarmi.fi), a sweet log-cabined working farm within a snowy forest, where you can drive the furry creatures from a fur-lined sled. Then lunch is on offer of, er, reindeer (delicious, and not unlike tender venison) at the folksy Nili restaurant (www.nili.fi), followed by a visit to the spellbinding Arktikum museum, with its displays of Sami life, Arctic creatures, icebergs and igloos (www.arktikum.fi). Best of all are the husky sled rides, which involve guests driving their own eight-dog sleighs through forests and over frozen lakes (www.huskypoint.fi).

Information on Rovaniemi from www.visitrovaniemi.fi or local operator

www.luxuryaction.com. Black Tomato (020 7426 9888, www.blacktomato.co.uk) organises three-night stays in log cabins (www.ounasvaaranlakituvat.fi), with return flight and trains, transfers, and husky and snowmobile safaris, from £1,515.



DIRECTORY



BEAUTIFUL TO BOOT

We realise travel shoe-kits do not feature in most men's fantasies. But John Lobb's is made of such soft leather, and its sunny interior contains such well-made wooden brushes, that we've taken a real shine to it. £390 (88 Jermyn St, SW1, 020 7930 8089).

DEER, OH DEER

There aren't many places in the world where you are almost guaranteed to see deer when you wake up. But then there aren't many houses in the middle of 23,000 acres of private wildlife reserve in Scotland, surrounded by the creatures. This winter will be the first that guests are able to stay in Eagle's Crag and Ghillie's Rest: two bothies within Alladale Private Reserve rebuilt from old stone outhouses, and immaculately restored as sustainably as possible.

Electricity is generated using hydro power from the lake, interiors are warmed by wood-burning stoves, beds hand-carved from timber on site, and bedroom rugs, throws and curtains all made from Scottish wool. Even better, local produce can be delivered to

guests to cook for themselves, or meals can be prepared in the nearby private lodge, and brought to the door. Sleeping four and six, the bothies cost from £400 and £700 respectively a night, inclusive of food, a four-by-four wilderness safari, fishing and mountain biking. In May, Alladale will host a fitness retreat, with an in-house nutritionist creating healthy meals and a fitness instructor leading such activities as mountain biking, pilates classes, circuit training, boxing and hillwalking. From £1,950, excluding flights (01863 755 338, www.alladale.com).



QUEEN OF ALL CARDS

Glamorous former City banker Elizabeth Sieff launches her new Little Emperors discount card this month, aimed at those who want to live luxuriously, but as affordably as possible. The card gives members

discounts, from 10 to 65 per cent, on fashion, restaurants, lifestyle services and, more importantly, travel. Among the 800 outlets signed up are spas such as Aveda, restaurants like The Ivy and Scotts, hotels such as The Ritz, The Met, Soho Hotel and Charlotte Street, and services from Browns chauffeurs to The VIPs dogwalking. The idea is that, although the card costs £575, members will save more than that annually on discounted purchases (www.littleemperors.com).



FLOWER OF THE DESERT

Amangiri is situated within 600 acres of private desert, overlooking the canyons that link Utah with Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado. Rather than spa treatments, the focus here will be on activities, from rock climbing, canyoneering, mountain biking and rope-climbing to days out with local scientists, geologists and naturalists. In contrast with the rugged environment outside – red and orange canyons and stark rockfaces – the 34 suites are slick, calming and softly sand-coloured. Four have pools, and some feature tempting fireplaces set into the outdoor veranda, so guests can lie outside at night and enjoy stars in the desert skies. From £380 a suite, www.amanresorts.com.

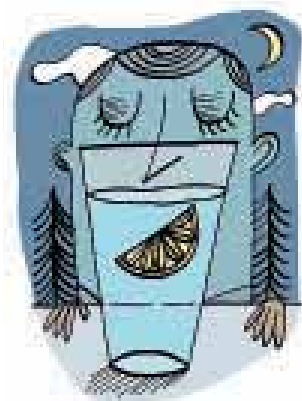
GETTY ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT SHADROLIT





TAKING THE BISCUIT

Chartering private yachts is normally not within our budgets. But a new yacht on the market may change this. Cookielicious, a new 72-foot Oyster (above), has been launched for charter from £15,500 a week, plus food and fuel – which isn't over the top considering it sleeps six adults and two children, in three big cabins, with ample space in the maple, air-conditioned interior. The boat, with a crew of two who skipper



FAST WAY TO GET FIT

Being a lover of good food, *Ultratravel* is not normally seduced by suggestions on how to starve. But, post-Christmas, we will no doubt be wishing we'd signed up to The Ultimate Detox weeks being offered by strict Austrian nutritionist Sabine Savisalo-Schuh. Set in the New Park Manor Hotel in the New Forest, her nine-day retreats – from January 12 to 21, March 16 to 25 and April 13 to 22, costing £1,895 – will help guests to fast, ingesting just fresh juices, herbal teas and buttermilk, and indulging in gentle exercise as well as meditation and detox spa treatments. Information on www.theultimatedetox.co.uk.

Pillow talk

If you're someone who finds it difficult to sleep at 35,000ft on a hard airline pillow, a cashmere travel set, designed by Belynda Macpherson, Elle's sister-in-law (www.banjoandmatilda.com),

DIRECTORY



SEEDS OF CHANGE

Once the World Expo was a forum for business and cultural exchange. Now it's an architectural extravaganza, with multi-million-pound pavilions competing for attention. Thomas Heatherwick's design for the British Pavilion at the next expo, in Shanghai from May 1 to October 31 (<http://en.expo2010.cn>), promises to be one of the most extraordinary. The 60,000 fibre-optic rods that make up the six-storey building will by day stream light into the interiors and by night give the round, dandelion-shaped structure an ethereal glow. Its contents will be as wild as the structure itself: within this pod of plastic rods will be millions of seeds from the largest collection of wild plant seeds in the world, courtesy of Kew's Millennium Seed Bank Project.

Of all the new hotels being built for the Expo, the most glamorous is the new Peninsula, its grand suites overlooking the Bund (soon to be the quietest road in the capital, when a tunnel opens to divert traffic underground). If its spacious, softly-lit dressing rooms and ESPA spa weren't tempting enough, the hotel has also invested in the most stylish transfer vehicle in town: a rare, restored 1934 Rolls Royce Phantom 11. When Expo organisers conceived the motto "Better City, Better Life", Rolls Royces probably didn't figure in their plans. But to our minds, arriving at a 1930s-style hotel in a 1930s-style car probably couldn't get much better. Rooms cost from £180, b&b, until February (00800 2828 3888, www.peninsula.com).

TRAVEL BY NUMBERS

*26,000 New rooms
being built for the Expo
140,000 Teas served a year
at The Ritz, London
50 Sails on the new Sea
Cloud Hussar
cruiseline*

N.B. NEW BOUTIQUE

THE BATH HOUSE APARTMENTS BATH

Why are they special? Kim Townsend and her partner Paul transformed The Bath House from a run-of-the-mill English bed and breakfast into a luxury bijou hotel a few years ago. Recognising that some guests wanted the services of a small hotel, but more independence, they recently opened two new apartments. The idea has taken off particularly among small groups and families who appreciate having their own front-door key in Britain's best-preserved Georgian city.

Where are they? Within walking distance of most of Bath's delights, from the architectural triumphs of the Crescent and Roman Baths (below) to the state-of-the-art delights of the rooftop Thermae Bath Spa. The Bath House's main building is a handy 100 metres away and the cafés of the converted Green Park train station across the road.



The look With warm maroon carpets, wooden floors, chocolate-brown sofas and a sparkling white kitchen, the flats feel modern and cosy, but lack some of the quirky charm of the main Victorian hotel.

Boutique bonus Parking is notoriously problematic in Bath, so the private spaces provided are a real plus. In addition, all kitchen essentials are supplied, as is continental breakfast.

Drawbacks The new apartments lack the elegant proportions of authentic Georgian buildings.

The details

The Bath House Apartments, 18 James Street West (07711 119847, www.thebathhouse.org) from £99-£199.

Johnny Morris

MORE THAN ALL WHITE

Even those of us who wrinkle our noses at man-made fibres are eyeing up Peak Performance's new couture ski label, Supreme. Its most covetable piece is the four-way-stretch white jacket, with a detachable down vest and hood. Sadly, it's £750. But that price is slightly more bearable if you think of it as two garments rolled into one (www.peakperformance.com).



The prettiest hotel in Paris

There are swankier hotels in France. There are those with bigger rooms. But for charm and location, it's difficult to beat the recently refurbished Pavillon de la Reine, on the Place des Vosges in the Marais. The 17th-century building might be covered with ancient clambering plants on the outside, but inside it's sleek and contemporary, with charming touches. Uncorked bottles of good wines are set out in the library, so guests can indulge their tastebuds while perusing books. Breakfast of freshly squeezed juice, crisp croissants, cold butter and thick raspberry jam is delivered with espresso on a silver tray in the morning. And the building is fronted by a private courtyard, planted with roses and lavender, in which to have afternoon tea, after a day of shopping in the nearby antiques district. Double rooms from £334 (www.pavillon-de-la-reine.com).



MAHARAJAS ON THE RAILS

Just six months after the first luxury train was launched in India – the Royal Rajasthan, taking guests on four-day journeys through the Golden Triangle of Jaipur, Ghana National Park and the Taj Mahal – two other luxury train operators have rolled their stock out on to the rails. This month, the first Indian Maharajah train will whisk guests in 44 suites from Delhi to Mumbai, taking in Jaipur, Ranthambore, the Taj Mahal,

World Heritage Sites Ajanta and Ellora, and Udaipur, with meals provided by the Taj Group of Hotels (from £2,684, including flights from www.tropical-locations.com). And in January, the Maharajas Express (above) will leave Mumbai on its inaugural journey to Delhi, its guests cosseted in one of 43 cabins, built to mimic the style of original Maharajas' trains (ie, slightly gaudy, with plenty of dazzling colours) but with the addition of 21st-century technology, environmentally friendly washrooms,

and entertainment in the lavish bar and two dining carriages. Unlike any other train in India, the Maharajas Express will stop to visit private estates: to take lunch, for instance, at the Maharaja of Bikaner's private hunting lodge, to drop in on an elephant polo match, or to take a boat trip on the Ganges to see sunrise at Varanasi. Trains will steam all over the country, from Mumbai to Kolkata, and journeys cost from £500pp a day, all-inclusive. Information from www.rirtl.com.





LITTLE ISLAND OF ONE'S OWN

Haggerstone Island, off the northeastern coast of Australia (left), has long been known as a rustic island escape for holidaymakers who want to experience a Swiss Family Robinson-style existence. But a new, extremely comfortable house called Mawu will entice another breed of travellers entirely. Built from local wood and thatch by the owners Roy and Anna Turner – who have lived on the island for 20 years, and brought up their two children there – the three-bedroom house, set on a hillside overlooking a turquoise lagoon in the Barrier Reef, has all the comforts of a five-star hotel, without fussy extras. So, as well as good fishing, snorkelling, swimming and diving, there are such unexpected treats as gourmet food, bathrooms open to the skies, a cellar stocked with fine wine, and a helicopter to explore the coast. From £550pp a night (www.haggerstoneisland.com).

GOING DUTCH

Its solar-powered lights, lock and brakes are integral, its saddle and handlebars covered with strokable soft leather, and it's made of aluminium. We're predicting the Vanmoof bicycle (www.vanmoof.com) might be the only way to travel soon. The three-gear No 5 is available from January for £548; a new female-friendly model will be available in March from www.velorution.biz.



TRAVELBIZARRE

All that's wild, weird and wonderful in the world of travel

MAKING A MEAL OF A CITY

We all understand the need for maps to help us navigate our way round cities. But place mats printed with maps of city centres? One way of having dinner in Tokyo, lunch in Paris, tea in London... £15.95, from www.conranshop.co.uk.

SOLID IDEA?

Those who like their drinks cold when travelling, but don't want to risk ordering ice, might want to haul around a stash of a new American invention: Whisky Stones. The little blocks of limestone can be kept in a hotel freezer, and popped into a drink when needed. Puts a whole new spin on ordering Scotch on the rocks. £17, from www.lekkerhome.com.

THE ANCIENT ART OF... TREE HUGGING

Perhaps hugging trees isn't quite as 21st century as we thought. At the Borgo Storico Seghetti Panichi in the Marche area of Italy, an entire garden was laid out between 1875 and 1890 according to the plants' healing magnetic energy, ranging from palms, holm oaks and olive trees to herbs that aid immune, nervous and cardiocirculatory systems. More than a century later, its royal Italian owners have opened the garden up, adding a pool and massage beds among the trees, so guests can soak up positive energy before retreating to their 17th-century home. A Green holiday, but not as we've known it. www.seghettipanichi.it.

I.V. FOR IVY

Non-greenfingered travellers, take note. Clever designers at Vitamin have invented a plantpot with an intravenous bag with adjustable flow, so travellers can go away, knowing their plants are being nursed every day. £159.50, from www.vitaminliving.com.

